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TWO ARABIC WORDS IN THE *ROMANCERO*

1. ALCARIA

In the "Romance del rey Marsín" (fifteenth century) a Moor, addressing angrily his fellow-combatants who are fleeing before the French, exclaims:

Alcaria, moros, alcaria—si mala rabia vos mate,
que sois ciento para uno—irles fuyendo delante;
¡oh mal haya el rey Marsín—que soldada os manda dare;
mal haya la reina mora—que vos la manda pagare;
mal hayáis vosotros, moros,—que la venís á ganare!

Professor Griswold Morley, in his *Spanish Ballads*, lists the word *alcaria* in the glossary with a question mark. This seems to be the only occurrence of the word in the *Romancero*.

Taking the context and the repeated *mal haya* as a basis, it would seem plausible to trace the word to a term in Arabic, which would fit the tone of the exclamation and the situation.

At first, the word *al-karīha* ('adversity' or 'peril in war,' from the root *kariha* 'to despise') suggested itself to me as a possible etymon, as it would combine both the idea of disgust at the cowardly attitude of the fleeing Moors and the warning at the impending danger. In discussing the matter with Professor M. Sprengling, however, he suggested *al-qāriʿa*, which undoubtedly fits the situation much better. The word is found repeated, in an exclamatory form, three times in succession at the head of a well-known chapter of the Qorʿān (Sūra CIII), which the majority of the Muslims know by heart and often allude to, especially when uttering maledictions against Satan. The general meaning is 'blow,' 'misfortune,' but in its Qoranic application it means 'the final retribution' (i.e., the day of Judgment). As the Moor is speaking of retribution, further on in his harangue, it would seem quite plausible that he should quote the Qoranic *al-qāriʿa* to spur his men on.

This etymon is also quite satisfactory from the phonetic point of view; cf. mod. Sp. *alcaria* and *alquería* (V. Covarrubias s.v. *alcarria*), derived from the Arabic *al-qarya* 'village.'

2. ALFÉREZ

In the "Romance de Fajardo" (end of the fifteenth century), the Moorish king is expressing great joy at a good move he had made:

jaque le dió con el roque,—el alférez le prendía.

Juan de Timoneda, in "Rosa española" (1573), corrected this to read *el orfil que le prendía* (*orfil*, mod. *alfil* = 'bishop'). It seems that he was not familiar with the game of chess and knew no Arabic names of the pieces used in it, except *orfil*. His correction is, in any case, quite out of place.

Two interpretations could be attached to the word as a chess term. The first and the most obvious one is that of 'knight' (literally 'horse,' Arab. *al-faras*). In O.Sp. there appears to have existed a confusion between *al-faras* 'horse' and *al-fāris* 'horseman,' 'standard-bearer,' and we find the word spelled both *alférez* and *alfaraz*, in addition to *alfiérrez*, *alfierse* (*Poema de Alfonso Onceno*, 1760), *alfierze* (*Libro de Alexandre*, 593), *alfrez*, *alfres*, and *alferce*.

The second interpretation, which would suggest itself by the jubilant attitude of the Moor, is that in this case 'queen' (Arab. *al-ferza*) is meant. Eguilaz (*Glosario*, 166) points out that the names *alferza* and *alférez*, as chess terms, were frequently confused. Chess players will agree with me that in the end-game one can always hope to make a draw, even when a piece down, but hardly so when the opponent captures the queen. The classic Arabic word for queen is *al-firzān* (from the Persian *firzīn*), but in the colloquial Arabic only *al-ferz* or *al-ferza* are used, as are *al-faras* for knight and *al-fīl* for bishop, as the writer knows from personal experience when playing the royal game with the ʿulemā of Al-Azhar mosque in Cairo.

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